

## *TCC's Quarterly Community Newsletter* *Spring, 2000*



# Quality Child Care



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"Good quality child care is a small number of children per caregiver; stimulating activities; and nurturing, trained, well-compensated staff who are in their jobs long enough to have warm and trusting relationships with the children." *Carol Kamin, Executive Director, AZ Children's Action Alliance*

### **THE NEED FOR CHILD CARE**

According to the Children's Defense Fund:

- Every day, 13 million preschoolers — including 6 million infants and toddlers — are in child care....three out of five young children.

- Millions more school-age children are in after-school and summer activities, and nearly 5 million children are left home alone after school and can be in care for as many as 40 hours per week until they reach school age.
- Women work outside the home in the overwhelming majority of American families: 65 percent of mothers with children under age 6, and 78 percent of mothers with children ages 6-13 are in the labor force.
- The majority (55 percent) of working women in the U.S. bring home half or more of their family's earnings.
- One out of three children of working mothers are either poor, even though their mother works, or would be poor if their mother didn't work.

### **THE NEED FOR *QUALITY* CHILD CARE**

Also from Children's Defense Fund, regarding *quality child care*:

"Child care helps shape children's futures, yet the quality of care for many children is inadequate.

- ✓ A recent Carnegie Corporation study confirmed that the quality of child care has a lasting impact on children's well-being and ability to learn. Children in poor quality child care have been found to be delayed in language and reading skills, and display more aggression toward other children and adults [see below in this article under, "Effects of Quality Child Care" for more detail on this study].
- ✓ Recent studies have found that much of the child care in the U.S. is poor to mediocre. One study found that 40 percent of the rooms serving infants in child care centers provide care of such poor quality as to jeopardize children's health, safety, or development.



- ✓ Professional, quality child care is hard to find in a marketplace where child care teachers and providers do not earn as much as bus drivers (\$20,150) or garbage collectors (\$18,100) — or even bartenders (\$14,450). A national wage study found that most child care workers earn only \$12,058 per year (only slightly above minimum wage) and most receive no benefits or paid leave. Hairdressers and manicurists must attend 1,500 hours of training at an accredited school in order to get a license, yet 40 states do not require child care providers to have any training prior to serving children in their homes.
- ✓ Scarcity of after-school programs leaves school-age children home alone. Nearly 5 million children are home alone after school each week, during the afternoon hours when juvenile crime peaks. A 1990 study found that eighth-graders left home alone after school reported greater use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana than those who were in adult-supervised settings. Good after-school activities for children and teens can be hard to find because options are inadequate in many communities. This problem is even more serious in low-income neighborhoods — for example, only one-third of schools in low-income neighborhoods offered before- and after-school programs in 1993.”

### FINANCING QUALITY CHILD CARE

Carol Kamin further states, “The reality is that good quality child care costs more than most parents can afford. Although most child care in Arizona is only mediocre, it already costs \$4,000 to \$6,000 per year per child. And we can’t expect child care providers to lower their prices. Recent studies document that most child care providers already operate on exceptionally tight budgets. Most of the cost of child care pays staff salaries – which are disastrously low. As a result, child care centers experience very high turnover of teaching staff, which, in turn, threatens their ability to offer quality care.” The Center for the Child Care Workforce reported in 1998 that “31 percent of all teaching staff at child care centers leave their jobs every year. By comparison, turnover among elementary school teachers is less than 7 percent per year.”



Children’s Defense Fund cites the following average annual child care costs for one three-year-old (child care for babies’ and toddlers’ care costs more):

<b>Boston:</b> \$8,840	<b>Durham:</b> \$4,630	<b>Dallas:</b> \$4,210
<b>Boulder:</b> \$6,240	<b>Oakland:</b> \$6,500	<b>Minneapolis:</b> \$6,030

The above are *average costs only* and do not necessarily incorporate *quality* child care components.

### THE EFFECTS OF QUALITY CHILD CARE

The Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Study, begun in 1993, is being carried out by a coalition of

universities and foundations, including the Carnegie Foundation. The study was designed in part to examine the influence of typical center-based child care on children’s development during their preschool years and next, as they subsequently moved into the formal elementary education system. Findings of the study are summarized as follows:

“The overall findings can be summarized in a few broad statements about the influence of center-based child care in America on children:

- **High quality child care is an important element in achieving the national goal of having all children ready for school.** Our findings showed that the quality of children’s experiences in typical child care centers affects their development while they are in child care and their readiness for school. Children who attended higher quality child care centers performed better on measures of both cognitive skills (e.g., math and language abilities) and social skills (e.g., interactions with peers, problem behaviors) in child care and through the transition into school. Further, this influence of child care quality was important for children from a wide range of family backgrounds.
- **High quality child care continues to positively predict children’s performance well into their school careers.** Our longitudinal analysis of children’s performance indicated that the quality of child care experienced by children before they entered school continued to affect their development at least through kindergarten and in many cases through the end of second grade. Child care quality was related to basic cognitive skills (language and math) and children’s behavioral skills in the classroom (thinking/attention skills, sociability, problem behaviors, and peer relations), both of which are important factors in children’s ability to take advantage of the opportunities available in school.



- **Children who have traditionally been at risk of not doing well in school are affected more by the quality of child care experiences than other children.**

For some outcomes (math skills and problem behaviors), children whose mothers had lower levels of education—children who often are at risk of not doing well in school—were more sensitive to the negative effects of poor quality child care and received more benefits from high quality child care. Moreover, for these children who attended typical child care centers, these influences of child care quality were sustained through second grade.

- **The quality of child care classroom practices was related to children's cognitive development, while the closeness of the child care teacher-child relationship influenced children's social development through the early school years.**

Children who attended child care with higher quality classroom practices had better cognitive development (language and math skills) through early elementary school. Children who had closer relationships with their child care teachers had better classroom behavior and social skills (greater thinking/attention skills and sociability, fewer problem behaviors, and better peer relations) through early elementary school. It is no surprise that the nature of children's experiences in child care are important, but the results of this study confirm the lasting impact of these early experiences. High quality child care experiences, in terms of both classroom practices and teacher-child relationships, enhance children's abilities to take advantage of the educational opportunities in school."



## CHILD CARE IN TEMPE

A recent market feasibility study by Grubb & Ellis reveals the realities of child care as a for-profit business. "An ideal income range [for quality child care], within 1-3 miles,

should be between \$60,000 and \$150,000....The Downtown Tempe market has been avoided by all major childcare providers...for one major reason...the average income is only \$36,000 to \$44,000 within a 1 to 3 mile radius. These families simply cannot afford to spend ±\$100.00 per week on quality childcare." No "ideal sites" were identified anywhere in Tempe. The study also points out that with incomes above \$150,000, child care, if needed at all, is usually provided by a "nanny or live-in provider."

The needs of low and moderate income families in downtown Tempe was the subject of further inquiry through a recent needs assessment carried out through a collaboration that included Tempe Community Council. The study area included the neighborhoods north of Broadway and west of Mill in addition to downtown Tempe. The process included written surveys and focus group interviews with neighborhood parents and downtown businesses. The assessment identified a number of challenges experienced by parents, including:



- ♦ *Just finding child care*, of any kind, can be difficult;
- ♦ *Cost* can be a burden – some families are paying as much as **30%** of household income;
- ♦ *Location* is another potential barrier if care is not available either near home, near work or on the commute path;
- ♦ *Hours of operation* is another difficult issue – most centers are open 6am– 6pm, M-F, while the need is 5am – 7pm;
- ♦ *Back-up care* is a critical need for when facilities are closed or there is illness;
- ♦ *Care for sick children and for children with disabilities* is very difficult to find;
- ♦ And, of course, finding *quality child care* anywhere is an over-riding issue.

The needs assessment proposed to address these goals within three years:

Additional <b>family-based</b> services (i.e., provided in someone's home)	<b>80 slots, priority for infant/toddlers</b>
Enhanced <b>facility based</b> services	<b>38 full day preschool slots 78 extended day slots – infant/toddler/preschool 50 regulated after-school slots 17 full day Head Start slots</b>
Enhanced <b>back-up care</b> and <b>sick child care</b>	

The first steps have been taken toward meeting those goals.

- 1) A former "crack house" at 508 W. Brown in Tempe, seized under the RICO law, will be made available by the City of Tempe for *family-based child care for up to 12 infant/toddlers*;
- 2) A proposal has been made to the City Council to expand the Westside Multigenerational Center to include *two classrooms of full or extended day child care for 34-40 children*.





## OPEN HORIZONS FAMILY & CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

its founding in 1989. The program began as a dropout prevention effort for parenting teens enrolled in high schools within the Tempe Union High School District (TUHSD) by providing child care for their infants and toddlers without which many would not be able to stay in school. Open Horizons has always been intended as a quality child care program. Maintaining it as such has proved a challenge that illustrates first-hand the difficulties of financing quality child care.



TCC has operated Open Horizons since

Open Horizons has grown more complex – and been significantly enhanced – by the addition in 1996 of new collaborative partners. Tempe Elementary District (TD3) provides space and utilities for Open Horizons at Broadmor School in exchange for discounted child care for its employees. Arizona State University Child Study Lab runs a preschool branch on the same campus and provides a number of resources and enhancements for the program. Other contributors provide considerable support. TUHSD provides \$25,000 in direct funding and transportation for teen parents. The City of Tempe provides funding and other in-kind support to Open Horizons. Many businesses and individuals donated over \$50,000 last year to the program. Valley of the Sun United Way is funding Open Horizons for \$20,000 this year. The Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) provides subsidies to low-income parents (basically ALL teen parents have little or no income) and is providing an enhancement grant for training, staff and equipment this year. Teen parents are asked to pay a small tuition for their children (\$4 per day) and TD3 and community parents pay tuition for their children who participate in the program.



And still, with these many resources, balancing the Open Horizons budget has been an annual struggle for TCC. Why? Quality child care isn't cheap. Just two cost factors help explain. Open Horizons maintains a ratio in the classroom of one staff or volunteer for each four children. The state licensing requirement is 1-5 for infants and 1-7 for toddlers. Also, in order to keep staff long enough for them to be "nurturing, trained, well-compensated staff who are in their jobs long enough to have warm and trusting relationships with the children," Open Horizons staff are paid an average adjusted wage of \$9.47 per hour including health care, disability, life insurance and pension benefits. The total average salary and benefit package equals about \$19,700

per year compared, for instance, to the figure cited above on page 2 of \$12,058 annually (which doesn't include the value of benefits, but then there are usually few benefits offered with child care jobs). Another reason for additional cost is that Open Horizons is not just about child care. Teen parents need training on how to be good parents and avoid second pregnancies, all of which requires more staff time with them.

Is it worth it? In terms of dropout prevention, the Open Horizons investment pays off. Only one Open Horizons teen parent (3%) dropped out last year vs. the national average of 50-60% dropout rate for teen parents. Most graduated or obtained a GED and have gone on to productive lives. Is the payoff as significant from providing the quality child care? That is more difficult to say because the effects are longer term in nature. However, the Carnegie study cited above gives significant new evidence that quality care does indeed pay off in many tangible ways. Creating more quality child care tailored to both what people can pay and what they will pay will be a major challenge in this new century.

### Bottom Line

Children are our most valuable natural resource. ~ [Herbert Clark Hoover](#) ~

Education costs money, but then so does ignorance. ~ [Sir Claus Moser](#) ~

The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children. ~ [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#) ~